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### GWU Undergraduate Research Program Enhances Student Success Outside the Classroom

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# GWU Undergraduate Research Program Enhances Student Success Outside the Classroom

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Office of University Communications

August 22, 2013

## *Summer Research Scholars Grant Offers Opportunity for Educational and Professional Development*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Three Gardner-Webb students recently completed a program designed to engage them in extensive summer research, and officials predict the results will benefit both the individual participants and the University at-large. Megan Frost, Blaire Teeters, and Kaitlyn Washburn each believe their summer research experience will help them take on any challenge the future may hold.

Dr. June Hobbs is the director of Undergraduate Research at Gardner-Webb. She developed the Summer Research Scholars Program as a special initiative within the University's Undergraduate Research Program. After providing resources for one summer research scholar in 2012 (Jeremy Griffin examined the chemical properties of ginger ale), the program was expanded this year and three students embarked on a summer of learning, research, and experience. Frost, Teeters, and Washburn each received a 2013 summer research scholars grant, which required them to engage in five weeks of focused research and provided them with on campus room and board as well as tuition remission, if applicable. The students each worked with a faculty mentor, who offered guidance and encouragement along the way.

For as long as she can remember, Megan Frost (Crofton, Md.) wanted to pursue a career in medicine. She was fascinated by the human body and assumed that becoming a doctor, nurse, or chiropractor would naturally be the right choice. She loaded her high school schedule with advanced placement classes and planned to double major in biology and chemistry at Gardner-Webb University in order to get into medical school—even though she hated chemistry. “Midway through my junior year of college, I realized that my heart wasn't in the pursuit of medicine anymore,” Frost reflected. “There was constant pressure, feelings of inferiority, and years of much-despised chemistry to come.”

In an effort to make a change, she decided to major in biology and minor in chemistry, which opened up room in her class schedule.

So, during the fall semester of her senior year of school, Frost took her first art class. “I fell in love with the art department. The teachers were extremely supportive and the students were as well,” she declared. “I remember one of the first things Ms. [Susan] Bell told our drawing class was, ‘I'm not going to teach you how to draw; I'm going to teach you how to see.’”

Megan Frost

Working with art professor Susan Carlisle Bell as part of her summer research, Frost hoped to examine the work of classical artists in order to perfect her craft and determine if she could combine her knowledge of medicine with her love for art. “I realized that medical illustration could be the solution that would allow me to do what I love without losing the years of pre-med study,” she shared.

She discovered the focus and dedication required during the program helped her in a variety of ways, particularly in offering her a better understanding about what defines an artist. “I learned so much not only about anatomy and art, but about the life of an artist: coming in to the studio in the morning and staying until late at night, sometimes even 2 a.m.; just getting lost in my work focusing solely on just what I am doing in the present time; some days even forgetting to eat and not realizing until I get home very late that I hadn’t eaten since breakfast! I gained enormous amounts of practice without the pressures of due dates or time restrictions that taking a class or anything other than this project would have imposed,” she stated. “If someone had told me that I was going to graduate with a major in art, I would have laughed at them and said they were crazy because I’m terrible at art and I haven’t taken a single art class since fifth grade. The summer research scholars program gave me the opportunity to really delve into the concept of medical illustration. When I found out I had been chosen for the program, I knew this was God’s plan for me and that it was Him letting me know I had made the right decision.”

Blaire Teeters (Parkland, Fla.) is another Gardner-Webb student with eyes on the medical profession. Teeters is pursuing her Bachelor of Science in Nursing and was selected as a summer research scholar so she could further analyze how patient death influences nursing staff and other healthcare providers.

Blaire Teeters

“I took Dr. Hobbs’ class ‘Death and Dying in American Culture,’ and I was fascinated,” Teeters explained. “People, especially in the health industry, view death as a bad thing when other cultures relate very differently to it. I wanted to try to explore the topic as it relates to nurses in the areas of perceived compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and burnout for nurses who experience work-related deaths. My research paper focused on how, as a student, I can suggest a more thorough teaching curriculum of death education within the pre-licensure curricula of nursing school.”

Working with mentor Dr. Susan Lane in the GWU School of Nursing, Teeters’ goals included conducting a survey for online summer nursing students and to complete at least one publication that she would be able to submit to a nursing journal. She also desired to learn more about the research process and begin to understand what is involved in that aspect of the healthcare profession.

“By far, the most valuable result of the project for me was learning the processes and details of writing a research paper and hopefully becoming a published writer,” Teeters shared. “Learning how research began and why there are so many regulations and restrictions helped me gain a new appreciation for my own participation.”

Teeters believes the survey component also taught her a great deal about the research process. “Our goal was to have at least 20 submissions and we received well over that number,” she explained. “I learned to analyze data and truly enjoyed discovering more about the details of this process.”

In summary, Teeters’ experience as a research scholar will help her tremendously in the future. “This program really opened doors for me and I look forward to seeing where it may take me,” she offered. “This is an accomplishment I am proud to put on my resume and present to potential graduate programs.”

Kaitlyn Washburn (Shelby, N.C.) is a physical education, health and wellness major who is already making plans for graduate school. As a senior with her focus on a graduate studies degree in psychology, Washburn wanted to examine whether Gardner-Webb students are indeed at risk of gaining more weight after spending a year as a college student. She, under the guidance of mentor Dr. Jeff Hartman, initiated research into whether the “Freshman 15”—an expression commonly used to reference an amount of weight often gained during a student’s first year at college—should be a concern for students who attend college here. Washburn began with a survey of over 100 freshmen in which questions were designed to gauge first year behaviors and weight changes. Students were surveyed at the start and at the end of the fall 2012 term, and again following the 2013 spring term.

Kaitlyn Washburn

“We wanted to determine if the ‘Freshmen 15’ was fact or fiction at Gardner-Webb,” Washburn said. “We discovered that *almost* half of freshmen students came in to Gardner-Webb with a body mass index (BMI) greater than 25. By the end of the spring semester, *over* half of the students had a BMI greater than 25. This means that our campus is making students bigger, and given the lack of self-reported strength training activity, bigger means fatter.”

Washburn said the overall research process and resulting paper have given her rich experience from which to draw upon as begins to make plans for graduate school. “From start to finish, my mentor [Dr. Hartman] and I met frequently to discuss the project and work on processing the data,” she explained. “He greatly helped me understand more about analyzing data and how to tie every piece of information together. I really enjoyed the opportunity to conduct research this summer and I know it better prepared me for graduate school. I’ve learned how to be disciplined throughout the research process and most of all, how to persevere.”

With a vision to offer increasing opportunities for Gardner-Webb's undergraduate students, Hobbs hopes to facilitate the program's continued expansion. "My dream is to eventually have at least 10 students living on campus and working on undergraduate research projects each summer," she explained. "Without question, these projects are a very important way we can add value to the overall educational experience for our students."

For more information on the Undergraduate Research Program at Gardner-Webb, or to find out how to apply for the Summer Scholars Research Program, contact Dr. June Hobbs at 704-406-4412 or email [jhobbs@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:jhobbs@gardner-webb.edu).

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University seeks a higher ground in higher education – one that embraces faith and intellectual freedom, and inspires in students a love of learning, service, and leadership.*